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Performing arts celebrated at festival

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

It was the invasion of the clowns at the 2003 Christian Performing Arts Festival February 21-22 at Ridgecrest Church, Madison.

"Christian clowning was our emphasis this year," said Harvey Ellis, coordinator of the annual event and consultant in the Discipleship and Family Ministry Department of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board. "In previous years we have keynoted drama, puppetry, and other

aspects of the Christian performing arts, so we thought it was time for clowning to be in the spotlight."

The clowns didn't seem to mind, of course. Pinky, Chuckles, Cricket, Buttercup, and several other appropriately-dressed buffos were only too happy to share their skills with the 471

people in attendance. They roamed the halls of the church entertaining children and adults alike, and they taught courses that included ventriloquism, character development, professional makeup, and making faces.

"Most people see clowns as funny and that's good," Ellis said, "but at the festival we also learned how Christian clowns can weave a very effective Gospel message into their presentations."

Also on the agenda were classes in balloons, design and construction of puppets, integrating magical illusion into ministry, stand-up comedy, props and gags, how to have an effective altar call, creative writing, and acting.

The recreation track included courses in organization and calendaring, "screamers and scramblers," water games, and edible activities. There was also a youth ministry presentation and a media track.

There were 99 such courses offered in five sessions over a day-and-a-half period. Thrown in for good measure were two creative worship plenary sessions and an open performance time.

Ellis said attendance was off this year by about 20 people, which he credited to severe weather warnings and flash

flooding across the state on the weekend of the festival.

"Given the fact that it rained really hard during the whole festival and there were so many watches and warnings issued during that time, I am heartened that so many people still found a way to attend," he pointed out.

Ellis also said the early date for this year's festival — it was moved up six weeks to avoid conflicts with other ministry events — didn't seem to have a big impact on attendance.

Robert Rowzee, pastor of New Fellowship

Church in Jasper Association, attended the festival for the first time along with his wife Vonda and daughter Casey. He said his family has sung together for many years, and he sees the performing arts as a way to extend the Gospel into places where it is not normally found.

"The performing arts present opportunities for the church to go outside its walls to present the Gospel in unique ways. It's especially good for reaching children," Rowzee said. He recommended the festival for Sunday School teachers, Sunday



TRAPPED BY SIN — Members of the drama team from Temple Church, Madison, depict a person lost in the grip of sin during the open performance time at the 2003 Christian Performing Arts Festival February 22 at Ridgecrest Church, Madison. (BR photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

evening study leaders, and others in the church who find themselves searching for creative ways to share the Gospel.

"It has something for everyone. I think Christian performing arts can generate a lot of interest in the church for spreading the Gospel," he said.

Ellis expressed appreciation to Stacy Andrews, Ridgecrest Church's college minister, and his team of volunteers for their contributions to the 2003 festival. "It ran smooth the whole time, and Stacy and his volunteers were the reason," Ellis said.

Ellis also thanked the 2003 Christian Performing Arts Festival planning committee:

- Myrna Gregory, member of Pinelake Church, Brandon.
- Vicki Roberts, member of Alta Woods Church, Jackson.
- Bobby Everett, member of Parkway Church, Clinton.
- Martha Cannon, member of Calvary Church, Batesville.

The 2004 Christian Performing Arts Festival will be held February 20-21 at First Church, Madison.

For more information on the 2004 festival and to offer suggestions for improvement, Ellis can be contacted at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. Telephone: (601) 292-3286 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651, ext. 286. E-mail: hgellis@mbcb.org.

The Christian Performing Arts Festival is supported each year by gifts to the Mississippi Cooperative Program.



MAYBE A BRIGHTER COLOR? — A trio of would-be clowns from First Church, Kosciusko try on new hair gear at the 2003 Christian Performing Arts Festival February 22 at Ridgecrest Church, Madison. The clown trio included (from left) Sherry Kimbrough, Bonnie Capps, and Connie Knight. (BR photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

WHAT'S IN THE RECORD

Pastor revs up ministry

Directions

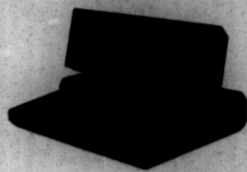
F'ship to honor Myers

Sunday School lessons



FIRST-TIME ATTENDEES — Robert Rowzee (left), pastor of New Fellowship Church in Jasper Association, attended the Christian Performing Arts Festival for the first time along with his wife Vonda (center) and daughter Casey. The Rowzees said they hope to use what they learned at the festival to share the Gospel in unique ways. (BR photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK



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Missions start at home

The Southern Baptist international missions efforts has been in the spotlight of late, and justifiably so. The untimely deaths of three long-term International Mission Board (IMB) workers and the wounding of a fourth worker at the hands of a Muslim fanatic in Yemen deserved all the publicity and prayers that were generated.

There are many others closer to home, however, who are equally in need of our prayer and financial support.

Many years ago, God in His wisdom led Southern Baptists to establish separate missions entities with distinctly different assignments: the Foreign Mission Board (now called IMB) for missions around the world, and the Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board) especially to evangelize North America.

International missions may sound more exciting and even produce more dramatic stories, but missionaries appointed by the North American Mission Board (NAMB) to minister all across the United States, Canada, and U.S. territories most certainly have stories to tell, too. They should not be overlooked by Southern Baptists or overshadowed by their international counterparts. Their work is just as important, and just as deserving of our support.

NAMB estimates there are more than 220 million unbelievers in the areas they oversee. Sadly, the United States is seen as such a lost country that Christian organizations in other parts of the world are sending missionaries to this country. What an embarrassment.

In addition, Islam is making tremendous inroads with the people in North America that Christians aren't reaching. Among American adults alive today, very few were likely to attend elementary school with a Muslim child. Now, it's not

unusual for a classroom to contain two or three Muslim children — even in Mississippi.

The challenges are great. The mission needs are great. If we don't win our homeland to Christ, how can we continue to send and support missionaries around the world?

Through Southern Baptists' sacrificial giving to the Cooperative

Program and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (AAEO) for North American Missions, NAMB in concert with many state Baptist conventions is able to support:

- more than 5,000 missionaries.
- over 2,500 chaplains serving in military, prison, hospital, and corporate settings.
- more than 23,000 World Changer youth volunteers who worked last summer on 87 projects that resulted in more than 1,700 professions of faith.
- over 20,000 disaster relief volunteers who served in excess of one million meals last year to disaster victims and assisted them in a myriad of other ways.

• many, many other programs that have proved successful in winning people to Jesus. Fully one hundred percent of AAEO gifts are used for North American missions work. Since its inception in 1895, the offering has provided over \$900 million for that work. The 2003 AAEO goal is \$53 million.

The goal is worthy, and the work is worthy of the goal. The 2003 goal is split into



three simple divisions from which all the NAMB programs flow:

- \$37,630,000 (71%) for missionary appointment, support, and equipping. As anyone who owns a business can attest, it takes money to recruit and retain high quality employees.

- \$9,540,000 (18%) for church planting. Southern Baptists have set a goal of starting 2,300 churches in 2003, and this portion of the AAEO goal will advance that campaign.

- \$5,830,000 (11%) for evangelism. Scripture distribution, special evangelism events, internet evangelism, and media campaigns are but a few of the programs covered by this category.

International missions are important, but so are missions at home. The God-ordained work of the many thousands of North American missionaries deserves no less than our fervent prayers and generous financial support.

Let's get busy and win North America — and the world — to Jesus.

GUEST OPINION:



African Americans and the SBC

By Sid Smith,
Jacksonville, Florida

Black Baptist roots, they can take advantage of the programs and resources offered by the SBC.

- There has been a generational shift in leadership in the SBC which has resulted in a greater openness to the inclusion of minorities in all areas of denominational life.

- The positive testimonies of African American pastors relative to their experiences in the SBC have contributed to a "satisfied customer effect" which makes membership in the convention attractive.

- The impact of the Southern Baptist church planting movement in the Black community has accelerated the increase in predominantly African American churches. Since 1989, Southern Baptists intentionally have been starting churches in African American communities.

If Southern Baptists are to be faithful stewards of the opportunity to reach the African American communities, seven

challenges must receive adequate response. Yesteryear's mindsets, motives, and methods will not suffice. The denomination must cross the threshold with an effective strategy for the 21st century.

- Inclusive planning relative to the African American community. Reaching the Black community effectively must be governed by intentionality manifested in a plan. To not have a plan can easily lead to the slippery slope of not planning to reach.

- Inclusive organizing. If the denomination is to be effective in reaching Blacks it must be organized for effective reaching.

- Inclusive staffing. The effective denomination today understands that God does not discriminate in the allocation of gifts, talents, and abilities based on race. Monoracial staffing policies are dinosaurs when trying to reach people groups in multiracial society.

- Inclusive budgeting. The

truism says: Commitment is shown by the budget.

- Inclusive research. A dearth of research exists on African American Southern Baptist churches. Southern Baptist research cannot afford to neglect the largest minority group in the denomination.

- Assimilating African Americans into the SBC.

- Bonding new African American churches into the total life of the convention. When denominational bonding is successful, new Black congregations will say: We are proud to be Southern Baptists.

A final conclusion is that Southern Baptists have a major opportunity to grow as a denomination. As old traditions, barriers and mores have passed away, behold, a new denomination has emerged. The modern SBC is bigger, better, and more Christian because of embracing inclusiveness.

God is not finished with Southern Baptists. The denomination is still in the process of growing. As the maturation process continues, the potential of doing even more is great.

Smith is director of the Florida Baptist Convention's African American ministries division. The full Baptist Press text can be read at www.sbc Baptist Press.org/bpfeature.asp?ID=901.

Church touches separated military families

KILLEEN, Texas (BP) — The clattering sounds of railcars rumbling down the tracks from Fort Hood are constant reminders that the nation is thundering closer to war — but for families, friends, and fellow church members of soldiers being deployed to Iraq say they don't need the 24-hour-a-day reminders.

"About 75% of our church is directly related to the military," said Joe Rich, pastor of Memorial Church in Killeen, Texas. "We have about 1,650 in attendance in Bible study and already more than 50 soldiers who have left. We're expecting to have 100-plus deployed. Just how many, we don't know."

For every soldier shipped out from nearby Fort Hood, usually at least one family member is left behind to maintain the home front.

Ministering to them has been Memorial Church's labor of love. While some remaining spouses choose to go home to their families, Rich said, several wives believe they can do their part in the effort by staying in Killeen and supporting each other, in part because of the church's ministry.

Sara Allison is one of those wives, as her husband, 1st Lt. Brian Allison of the Signal Corps in the U.S. Army, is

scheduled to be deployed in two weeks. "Right now, I'm okay, but I've been told the reality of it all sets in about two weeks after he leaves."

"We don't have children, so my first thought was to go home to Pensacola." As a result of the church's ministry, "a great Sunday School class," and being a part of the music ministry at the church, Allison said she's planning to stay in Killeen.

members have been in their shoes and were recipients of ministry years ago.

"The soldiers are putting their lives on the line, concentrating on doing their job and it's a lot easier when they know that the home front is being taken care of," Rich said.

"There's a saying with the military of 'I've got your back' and that's what we're doing for their families. We want to tell them we've got them covered, don't worry. We need to take care of the family, whatever that means. Soldiers take care of soldiers."

Cpl. Jerry White was deployed in January. Two weeks after he left the family van had a major problem, leaving his wife Malynnda and three children

istering to the families are the church's Sunday School and deacon ministries.

"Every member is assigned to a deacon and everyone is assigned to a Sunday School class. With those two ministries, we are meeting the families' needs, whatever they might be," the pastor said.

"Because our church is a large church, we want to break it down to be a family church. Sunday School classes are made up of couples around the same age and some have been deployed and some have not, so the mix is good to lend support to the families."

Some of the support efforts include weekly meetings for wives. "I don't know of any wives who have been deployed and their husbands left here, so it's all women in the groups. They meet and talk, sharing whatever needs they have."

They even share e-mails from those already deployed and put them all together to see the bigger picture of what it's like over there," Rich said.

It's not just the tears they share together. Some of the women who have been there before give comfort, advice, and spiritual encouragement to those left behind for the first time.

Even though her husband served in Desert Storm before they were married and was deployed last year to Kuwait, White said this time is different.

"I don't know where he'll be and they'll likely see action. Staying together and having [other wives] who have been through it tell you what to expect really helps. The support lets the younger women know what to expect and the reasons why things happen, even if the husband can't explain it all."

Pastoring a military church is unique because of the comradery that unites the church, Rich said.

The two major tools Memorial Church uses in ministering to the families are the church's Sunday School and deacon ministries.

They meet and talk, sharing whatever needs they have.



SUPPORTING THE TROOPS — At Fort Hood in January, President George W. Bush greets troops readying to deploy to the Middle East for the showdown with Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein. Memorial Church is among the churches in Killeen, Texas, seeking to help soldiers' families while their loved one are on active deployment. (BP photo courtesy of Fort Hood)

"Brian joined the military after we got married and I'm from a military family, so I know a little bit of what to expect," she said. "My dad was in Vietnam so my mother has been where I'm going to be, but they know I'm strong and I'm getting support from them and the church."

Over the years, Memorial Church has developed a strategy of ministry to families in times like these. In fact Rich, who has been at Memorial Church since 1992, said some of the retired military church

stranded without a working vehicle. When one of the deacons heard about it, he made a plea to the church. More than \$1,000 came in to meet the need.

"The church has been awesome," White beamed. "I haven't gone a Sunday without someone asking about Jerry since he's been gone. People have called me to make sure we're doing okay."

"During the revival, when our van broke down, we had people come by and give us a ride to church, which is not easy since we have three children."

She added that the spiritual aspect of having the men of the church pray with the children and giving a male influence has been meaningful, especially to her son.

The two major tools Memorial Church uses in min-

Prison program challenged

WASHINGTON (BP) — A leading proponent of strict separation of church and state has charged that a successful Christian prison program violates the First Amendment's ban on government establishment of religion. Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) challenged the state of Iowa's promotion of the InnerChange Freedom Initiative in a state prison in two suits filed in a federal court in the state. Prison Fellowship Ministries operates the InnerChange program. AU said the program, which also operates in prisons in Kansas, Minnesota, and Texas, is a merger of government with religion. In the suits, the Washington-based organization said InnerChange is guilty of religious indoctrination of prisoners, religious discrimination in hiring staff members, and favoritism toward inmates who participate. AU Executive Director Barry Lynn called InnerChange "one of the most egregious violations of church-state separation I've ever seen." The program has shown evidence of reducing the number of released inmates who return to prison. The Criminal Justice Policy Council in Texas recently released a report that found 40 percent of graduates of InnerChange returned to prison within two years, while 22 percent of those who were eligible for the program but did not participate returned within two years. Lynn said the program "in no way violates the separation of church and state."

MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS

**THE
SECOND
FRONT PAGE**

Record

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Looking back

10 years ago

A Home Mission Board study of Freemasonry concludes there is no contradiction between the teachings of Masons and Christianity, but anti-Mason Baptists call for the dismissal of the author after a letter surfaces in which he urges Masons to attend the SBC in large numbers.

20 years ago

An all-time high enrollment for Sunday School and a 7.5% increase in church training enrollment led the way for across-the-board gains in Southern Baptist Convention programs for 1982.

50 years ago

A recent letter to the editor of The Baptist Record reads, "I wish that all churches would pray for their pastors instead of criticizing them. Criticizing pastors not only tears up the churches, but tears up the minds of little children."

Pastor revs ministry while enjoying sport

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP) — Members of this church wouldn't be surprised to find their pastor looking a little beaten up as he steps into the pulpit on Sunday mornings.

Randall Easter, of First Church of Briar in Azle, Texas, has been a pastor and dirt-bike racing enthusiast for the past two years. Easter and his family have turned nights at the races into a family fun and ministry event.

"I ride because I like to ride, but we're able to do ministry while we're there," said Easter, a graduate of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth.

who might not normally go to church.

"I think it's encouraging to have a pastor who is willing to share his faith in different avenues of ministry," Comer said.

Easter recalled an occasion when he passed out tracts after a Motocross practice. The church's contact information was listed on the tract. Not long after that, a new couple came to the church. It was only after Easter referenced Motocross racing that the couple realized it was the pastor who had given them the tract. They are now active members of the church, Easter said, and they continue to race as well.

The Easter family arrives early for the races, takes along a picnic, and offers a prayer of "Lord, we're available" before settling in for the evening's events. Easter said he races "if my bike is not broken and I don't have any broken bones." His 8-year-old son, Caleb, races as well.

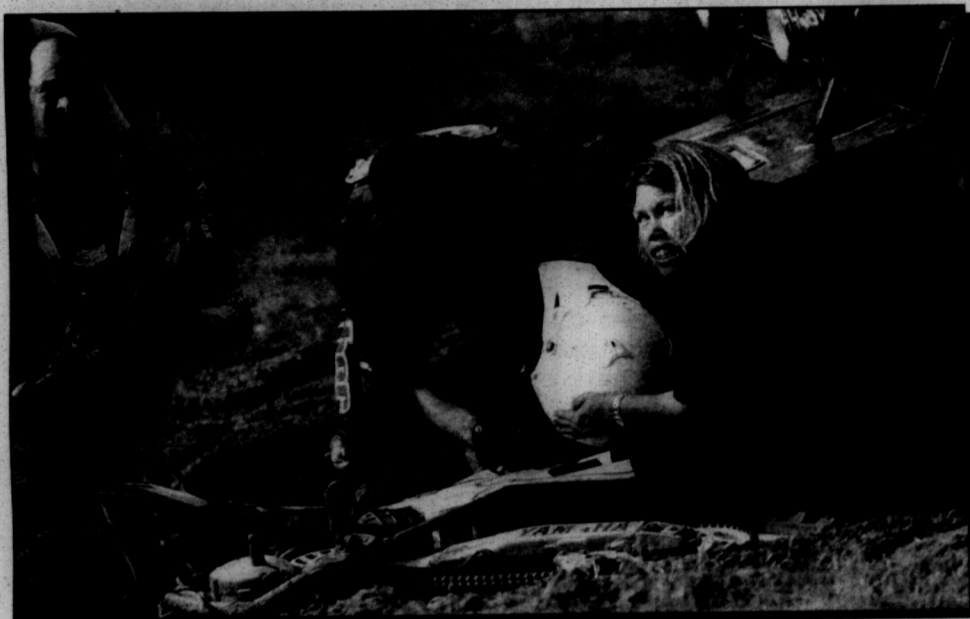
"You build a network of people just by being there for the races," Easter said.

Easter's wife of 14 years, Beverly, can be found on the sidelines cheering on the family as they race. She also takes the opportunity to share with those around her. Their daughter Samantha provides moral support, Easter said, while two-year-old Joshua provides comic relief and an open door for conversation with other parents.

"There are literally hundreds of people at the racetrack every week," he said. Prior to each race Easter leads a prayer over the public address system, and several people meet

in a small group for prayer prior to the races. Easter said his son has been praying consistently for his hero — a local dirt-bike racer who is not saved. "The guy came to our prayer circle and joined hands with my son in that prayer circle," Easter said, noting that they continue to pray for the man's salvation.

Easter has broken both collarbones and both shoulders but continues to ride. While he said he doesn't attempt to justify Motocross racing with evangelism, Easter said that his ministry should be viewed in light of the New Testament or seeing ministry as going where the lost people are.



OFFERING HELP — Randall Easter (center) a Texas pastor and dirt-bike racing enthusiast, assists a paramedic treating a 14-year-old boy who fell and then was run over by two competitors during a recent motocross event in which Easter participated. (BP photo by Richard McCormack)

Easter rode motorcycles while growing up in rural Texas, but he never raced them. Soon after he became the church's pastor, however, he became interested in racing when he learned that several church members were avid Motocross racers.

"We picked up some dirt bikes and started riding so my family and I would have something to do together," Easter said.

Today the family can be found at a local racetrack almost every Friday night and on various weeknights. Although Easter's first priority is his work as a pastor, Friday nights are generally free of responsibilities.

Several members of the church can be found at the races as well. Southwestern Seminary student Alissa Comer, a member of Easter's church, said she believes that the ministry provides ways to minister to people



UP AND OVER — Southern Baptist pastor Randall Easter of Azle, Texas, "gets air" as he practices for an upcoming Motocross competition. "I ride because I like to ride," the pastor says, "but we're able to do ministry while we're there." (BP photo by Richard McCormack)

IMB issues call for 'Xtreme' missions participation

RICHMOND, Va. (BP) — Young Southern Baptist men looking for adventure and an opportunity to share the gospel with unreached people groups might consider a new ministry opportunity with the International Mission Board (IMB).

Those chosen will travel in groups called Xtreme teams to remote areas of western South America to help start church-planting movements among the 76 people groups there that have never been exposed to the Gospel. Believers

from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru also will be members of the teams.

"The teams will locate unevangelized groups, do

basic evangelism, and saturate an area with the Gospel using radio, cassettes, and other available outlets," said Chris Ammons, Xtreme team coordinator.

The assignment, which would consist of a two-to-three-year commitment, requires that workers be between the ages of 21-30. Workers must be able to endure humid jungles, long hikes, and high altitudes of 17,000 feet above sea level in the Andes Mountains.

"These young people will be more likely to have the physical stamina and ability to go into areas with challenging terrain," Ammons said.

The teams will seek out people groups living in areas that are difficult to access and have a population of 25,000 or less. Xtreme teams will be able to reach areas that career

missionaries are not currently engaging, said Debbie Floyd, stateside advocacy coordinator for the region.

"To take the Gospel to these people will require extreme strategies so the missionary task can be finished in western South America," she said.

Workers will receive training in language study, chronological Bible storying, rescue, survival skills, and how to handle hostage situations. Teams will live in areas with various people groups for about six months at a time. The team's goal will involve producing spiritual leaders in an area before moving to the next area.

The first wave of "Xtremers" will be limited to single young men but that will eventually change, Floyd said.

"Future teams will include women," she said. "The reason-

ing for young men in the first wave has to do with areas where these men will travel. Safety is certainly a concern in areas where Americans are seldom if ever seen."

Teams will train Sept. 17-Oct. 29 at the IMB's Missionary Learning Center near Richmond, Va., and then proceed to a training camp outside Lima, Peru. The teams will travel to Bolivia and Peru the first year and into Ecuador the second year to locate unreached people groups in these regions.

For more information on joining an Xtreme team, call toll-free (866) 281-8755, or e-mail Chris Ammons at goXtreme@imb.org. To commit to pray for the teams, e-mail prayXtreme@imb.org. More information also can be found by visiting <http://www.thextremeteam.org>.



Take a few moments and think about the number 16. In recent days, it has come to the forefront of my mind repeatedly. Now, this is not an exercise in numerology, the study that attributes certain values or a particular significance to a number. While I find numerology to be interesting and sometimes even insightful, there are other times when it seems as though someone presses the issue far beyond reality. But, for a few moments, let's think about 16.

Consider 16 days. In the middle of January, 2003, the Columbia space shuttle lifted up off of the pad at Cape Canaveral and headed on its mission for 16 days. On board were seven people that we have all come to know extremely well. They were gifted, energetic, intelligent, diverse, and excited people. For all seven of them, this kind of moment and these 16 days were the culmination of dreams, hopes, and hard work.

While we do not know exactly what happened to cause the Columbia to disintegrate, initially there was a focus on a piece of foam. This piece of foam was possibly accompanied by ice that may have hit the fragile underside of the shuttle where those life-preserving heat tiles are glued. If some of those tiles were knocked off and the extreme heat was allowed to penetrate into parts of the shuttle itself, there would be no hope for the crew at re-entry. NASA was aware that there was a problem at lift-off. They looked at it, examined it, discussed it, and concluded that there was no significant damage and that the crew would be okay.

On the ground, there were evaluations and debates concerning this issue as the crew flew on into day one, two, three, four... carrying out experiments and sending back data. Their conversations and reports were charged with excitement. When you think about 16 days, there is a possibility that these astronauts had their doom sealed at the very outset of



Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

their trip. Though they did not know it, and although NASA did not believe it, it could well have been that there was no hope for them after their journey.

Think about it. Here are seven wonderful people doing exactly what they wanted to do with enthusiasm, joy, and unhidden exuberance. For 16 days they poured their lives into exactly what they had trained for, longed to do, and loved accomplishing. For this writer and each reader, we too are on a journey that will end. The writer of Hebrews says, "It is appointed unto man once to die," and that sentence rests upon you and me! When? Where? How? Obviously, none of us know. What are we to do? Well, let's look at the lessons that exist in the approach of life of these seven astronauts for 16 days: Give it your best! Enjoy the moment! Share the ride! Bless someone's life! Leave a legacy! And, take the journey with Christ, as did several of the crew members who were strong Christians. For them, it radiated in their lives that Jesus was the difference maker. From the beginning and along the way, and no doubt till the very end, their trust was in Him. What if you were given 16 days? How would you make them count for the Lord? You may have many more days, but you also may have many less.

Consider 16 minutes. After being away for 16 days, riding on a space ship at 17,000 mph and circling the globe time and time again each day, the astronauts aboard Columbia were 16 minutes from home. Have you ever been away from home for a long time — a week, two weeks, or

maybe a month? What a joy it is to return home, and the Columbia crew was almost home. Their families were gathered at the runway — wives and husbands, moms and dads, children, and friends. They were only 16 minutes away and that reunion was never to be.

Some of the crew had already talked to family on the ground and others had sent e-mails prior to landing, but the hugs and kisses, smiles and laughter would never be exchanged — separated by only 16 minutes! I have read where they were traveling at mach 23, mach 20, mach 17, or that many times the speed of sound. Faster than a bullet! The speed at which they traveled is inconceivable to me, and at the same time, I know of folks who are traveling pretty fast down here on this earth. They catch planes here and there, make a quick run over to somewhere, and then they head back home. Depending on the traffic, weather conditions, and highway work crews, it takes me about 16 minutes to get home myself.

It would probably change many of us, as well as many of our relationships, if we cherished the miracle of those 16 minutes in our own lives. Maybe if when we leave, we could realize that we may never return, then when we did return, it would be with such a joy that we would never want to leave. We would be holding on to something good!

Consider 16 people. Actually, there are more than 16, but use this 16 somewhat as a metaphor of a significant number of people who care if you return and struggle if you do not. It is the cluster of family members that are gathered at the cape in Florida on that

Saturday morning — children (young and old), spouses, parents, brothers, sisters, in-laws — all looking to the skies longing for their loved ones. Meanwhile, we as a nation were caught in one of those indescribable, riveting, cataclysmic, emotional experiences where we thought, felt, desired, hoped, and lost; yet, it was nothing to be compared with what those family and friend clusters experienced. For us, the event is now 3-4 weeks in our past, while for them, it will never be removed from their future!

How do you go on? Is it possible to pick fragments from out of the sky or that have fallen to the ground and put anything together that will look like or help you to make sense of life? Is it possible to bring joy back into your world? Some of you know exactly how that feels. You laughed, dreamed, worked, and looked forward to sharing some piece of life with someone so significant and then a word that you never wanted to hear arrived. It may have been a car wreck; a call from the doctor; a lingering illness; or a tragedy at the work place. Without any preparation or training, you stepped into the worst nightmare of your life and you were one of the 16. Oh, there were others around you who felt as deeply as you did, but even they could not help you.

But, many of you, like me, really knew that you weren't alone. While there were caring human beings around you who were not able to really help, the Lord of life, love, and eternity came to your heart. How many times have I heard Him say to me and to the people like the 16 I referred to, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. Let not your heart be troubled..." or, as so beautifully stated by the wife of the commander of the Columbia, Rick Husbands, when she quoted his favorite verses, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thy own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). Then she said, "I do not understand all of this, but I will trust Him." So will I!

Genuine living faith in God enables you to celebrate the 16!



YOU CAN RESPOND RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you.
(I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death.
(I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you.
(I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with him.
(I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name
(John 1:12).

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

Planting Seeds for Tomorrow's Garden

Hundreds of varieties of daylilies grow around the white picket fence in the yard of Michael and Berneda Wilkinson. The Wilkinson's beautiful yard only begins to give you a glimpse of who they are.

Michael and Berneda Wilkinson came to the Baptist Foundation in 1999. "I had always known about the Foundation and had read about it in the Baptist Record" said Michael. "I was always a bit uncomfortable being in the stock market and so I decided to call the Foundation and find out more." After talking with them, Michael contributed his stocks and set up a gift annuity for his wife Berneda. "It gives her income for life, I received a tax deduction and we named Baptist Health Systems the beneficiary of the funds after we're gone," stated Michael.

Having local people working for them was one of the main reasons the Wilkinsons decided to use the Baptist Foundation. "I have no regrets about my decision and I would tell others to go ahead and see what the Foundation can do for you," shared Michael.

The Wilkinsons are members of First Baptist in Brandon and have three grown children.



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NAMES IN THE NEWS & JUST FOR THE RECORD

Ebenezer Church, Liberty, reinstated Lane Templeton as a deacon on Feb. 16. Pictured (from left) are Templeton, his wife Pat, and Charles Kirkfield, pastor.



The Templetons & Charles Kirkfield, pastor

Ebenezer Church, Liberty, honored Yesterday's Youth with a banquet and certificates of years of service. Pictured (from left) are Betty Callender, Helen Lambert, Jane Rape, W. M. Ivey, Joyce Hughes, Kitty Ivey, and Virginia Forbes.



Yesterday's Youth - Ebenezer Church, Liberty

The GAs of First Church, Booneville, posed for photographs for Valentine and Birthday cards to MKs. Pictured (from left, front) are Abigail Taylor, Danielle Hawkins, Constance Cleveland, Caroline Goodwin, Hannah Billingsly, (back) Victoria Scott, Rebecca Taylor, Lindsay Long, Hannah Nichols, and Elizabeth West. Donna Cleveland and Rebecca West are leaders.



GAs of First Church, Booneville

The Puppet Ministry of Barnes Crossing, Saltillo, will present a musical program March 30 at 6 p.m. J. D. Johnson is pastor.

A free health fair will be open to the public March 6 from 8:30 a.m.-noon at Colonial Heights Church, Christian Life Center, Jackson. For more information, call (601) 956-5000.

The Greenses, Boone, N.C., will be in concert March 2 at 10:45 a.m. at Antioch Church, Union. A love offering will be taken. James E. Young is pastor.



Team Kids of Harmontown Church, Harmontown



Cooley

was recognized and presented with an engraved silver tray and a luncheon was given in her honor following the worship service. Dale Funderburg is pastor.

The GAs of First Church, Olive Branch, sponsored a Father/Daughter banquet Feb. 8. Ed Nixon, Baptist Children's Village, was the speaker. Bill Britton, Minister of Music, and his daughter Melissa, provided music.

The youth of Harmontown Church, Como, gave a spaghetti

Beth Cooley celebrated 25 years as pianist at Grace Memorial Church, Gulfport, on Feb. 19. She was recognized and presented with an engraved silver tray and a luncheon was given in her honor following the worship service. Dale Funderburg is pastor.

The Team Kids of Harmontown Church, Como, meet every Wednesday evening. There were 51 present the week of Feb. 12.

Pictured are the children enjoying snacks in fellowship hall.

New Hope Church, Foxworth, recently recognized those with perfect attendance in Sunday School. Pictured (from left) with consecutive years of perfect atten-

dance are B.B. Stringer, 47 years; Sherrill Magee, 21 years; Chase Clark, 6 years; Bonnie Pittman, 12 years; Nancy Thomas, 19 years; and Jimmy Thomas, 33 years.



New Hope Church, Foxworth



GAs Banquet - First Church Olive Branch



Youth Spaghetti Lunch, Harmontown Church

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